

Alabama's First District

## CONGRESSMAN JO BONNER

### THE WASHINGTON REPORT



315 Cannon House Office Building ★ Washington, DC 20515 ★ (202) 225-4931 ★ Winter/Spring 2006



Dear Friends,

A new year almost always brings with it reason for hope... hope for peace, hope for prosperity and good health, and hope for better times in the coming weeks and months.

Hope for better times is certainly high on the wish list for many

south Alabama families, especially those living in south Mobile County and parts of Baldwin County adversely affected by Hurricane Katrina.

For many of these friends and neighbors, 2006 also brings with it hope for a new beginning.

In Washington, a new year also ushers in a clean slate of sorts.

Sure, there is the unfinished business that Congress did not get to during the past 12 months. Much of that will top an already ambitious agenda for the coming year.

But there is also a chance starting on Jan. 31, when the president delivers his State of the Union message, for the country to come together on some important — and quite candidly, historically divisive issues — that must also be addressed.

Included elsewhere in this newsletter are some of those issues, along with an update on some of the major legislative victories of the past year.

Also in this report comes a standing invitation to send me your ideas and suggestions as we go forward in trying to solve some of the challenging issues facing our country. A list of our upcoming town meetings is included on page 2 in case you would like to come out and share those ideas with me in person.

As always, it is a pleasure and an honor being your voice in this, "the People's House." It is a privilege to work on your behalf.

Whenever my staff or I can be of assistance, I hope you won't hesitate to call on us.

#### 2005 — A productive, yet challenging, year

In many ways, it is hard to believe that a year ago America was getting ready for the 55th Presidential Inauguration.

With a snow-covered Capitol providing the backdrop, President Bush became only the 16th president in history to be sworn in to a second term in office. And during most of last year, the president traveled around the country trying to

advance what both critics and admirers concede was a bold, ambitious agenda.

Topping the list, at least on the domestic front, was the president's call to strengthen and modernize Social Security.

To his credit, the president crisscrossed America highlighting the growing concern that if something is not done, Social Security will soon start paying out more than it takes in. While the president made a lot of headway in the all-important area of convincing the public that there is a problem, the American people have not — to date — embraced many of the president's proposed solutions, namely his call for personal savings accounts.

the House passed legislation aimed at slowing the growth rate in federal spending, a move awaiting final approval when we return to Washington later this month.

On top of this, both Congress and the administration have stepped in and provided unprecedented financial support in the wake of the most widespread — and costly — natural disaster in U.S. history, Hurricane Katrina. All total, more than \$66 billion has been appropriated to repair everything from the broken levees in New Orleans to getting the debris removed from the roads and highways throughout south Alabama.

In our state alone, close to \$490 million has been provided to disaster victims since the storm hit south Alabama on August 29.

While more help may likely be needed in the years to come, this financial response reflects the genuine commitment of your federal government in trying to help get the Gulf Coast back on its feet.

#### Progress in Iraq

The historic elections in Iraq last month — where more than 70 percent of the Iraqi people in some cases risked their very lives for the right to come out and cast their vote — was just the latest sign that real progress is being made in this country that just three years ago was under the tyrannical rule of Saddam Hussein.

Under Saddam Hussein, there was no freedom of speech or freedom of the press. Today, there are 44 commercial television stations, 72 commercial radio stations and over 100 independent newspapers. Internet subscribers have risen from 5,000 before the war to more than 196,000 in September.

Granted, we did not go to war in Iraq to ensure that the people over there have access to the Internet.

But with so many south Alabama families having been intimately — and sometimes painfully — involved in the transformation from the Iraq of yesterday to the Iraq of today, it is important to note the many good things that are happening and the progress that is being made.

The fact is Iraqis are taking control of their own country and, by extension, their own destiny. Earlier this month, the president raised the possibility that troop levels will decrease by several thousand over the course of this year.

Iraqi security forces are continuing to make progress. By the end of December, more than 215,000 Iraqi security forces had been trained and equipped. And the Iraqi people are beginning to place their confidence in these security forces.

See Letter continued on page 2



*A personal goal is to visit every school in the First District — all 250 of them! Late last year, I had a chance to talk to a group of future "scientists" about the importance of wetlands at the Pelican's Nest Science Lab at Fairhope's K-1 Center. The purpose of the Pelican's Nest is to provide opportunities for K-5 students to better understand the ecology of Mobile Bay. Mrs. Pat Carlton is the principal of Fairhope K-1 Center and Mrs. Charlene Dindo, a national teacher of the year, is the director of the Pelican's Nest. Shown above with the students is Ms. Worth Mayfield, a student teacher and recent graduate of the University of South Alabama.*

As a result, reforming Social Security remains a necessity, but not necessarily a top priority, in today's climate. In order to ensure Social Security's solvency, however, this debate cannot be put off indefinitely.

Despite that setback, Congress did pass — and the president signed into law — several significant pieces of legislation that deserve mention. Among them: a comprehensive energy bill, a highway bill, CAFTA, bankruptcy reform and class action reform. And, for the first time in more than a decade,

(Letter continued from page 1)

With the election last month comes something else... a constitutional democracy at the heart of the Middle East. And, as President Bush said during a nationally televised address from the Oval Office last month, "This vote — 6,000 miles away, in a vital region of the world — means that America has an ally of growing strength in the fight against terror."

As Senator Joe Lieberman, D-CT, recently wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* following his fourth trip to Iraq in November, "more work needs to be done... but the Iraqi people are in reach of a watershed transformation from the primitive, killing tyranny of Saddam to modern, self-governing, self-securing nationhood."

Although there have been some calls in Congress for an immediate withdrawal from Iraq, I believe both Senator Lieberman and President Bush are right. We must finish the job and finish it right; quitting now, just for the sake of quitting, is no real exit strategy.

And as soon as humanly possible, we must welcome our troops home to open, grateful arms.

**Ethics and Trust**

No annual report could be complete without touching on a sensitive, yet important, topic — the subject of ethics and trust in government.

In recent months, the national news has been full of reports of high level officials in the administration — and even some members of Congress — being investigated for possible criminal activity. Whether it involves a Republican or a Democrat, this always makes it uncomfortable for all of us who serve in the public arena, be it at the federal, state or local level.

Two things to keep in mind:

First, in America, a person remains innocent until proven guilty. As such, an indictment by a grand jury — which, obviously, is a serious matter — is just one part of a broader criminal investigation. The most important part of that process, however, comes when the trial jury makes its verdict... was the person acquitted of the charges or found guilty?

Second, if a person is found guilty of abusing his or her public trust, then the people have every right to be concerned, disappointed, and even outraged!

Perhaps the darkest day in this recent storm cloud came late last year when a prominent congressman from California, former Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham, admitted he had taken more than \$2 million in bribes during his years in office.

House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert said it best when he said the former "Top Gun" pilot was "a war hero whose service to defending America had built a deep respect for him on Capitol Hill. However, the public trust he has built through his military and congressional career has been violated. The behavior by Congressman Cunningham is unacceptable. No one is above the law."

Without question, we all are subject to making mistakes. But in my view, public officials should be held to a higher standard. The sacred trust instilled in those of us in public office should never be taken for granted nor put on the auction block to the highest bidder, whether the official is a U.S. congressman, the governor of a state or the mayor of a small town.

And as is so often the case, just because there are one or two bad apples does not mean the whole barrel is bad. But when someone does wrong — no matter what their title may be — that person must suffer the consequences.

One of my favorite sayings comes from a Junior League of Mobile bumper sticker; I'm sure you've seen it on the streets and roads throughout south Alabama. Simply put, it reminds us all to "Do the Right Thing."

While there is no way I can ever make all 635,000 people happy with every single vote that must be cast, allow me to reaffirm my commitment to you that I will always attempt to do the right thing with the trust you have placed in me.

As George Washington, the father of our country said, "I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man."

Hope our paths cross soon. Please call whenever we can be of service.

*To Bowmer*

# Twenty meetings scheduled

One way our office tries to stay in close touch with the people of south Alabama is the frequent scheduling of town hall meetings whenever the legislative calendar in Washington permits.

Later this month, my staff and I will once again hit the road, traveling to twenty communities in all six First District counties. Listed below are the times and locations of the meetings nearest you.

Since becoming your congressman, we will have held over 135 town meetings throughout the First District. Hopefully, you will be able to join us for a town meeting near you.

**Monday, January 23**

- 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. - Chatom  
Town Hall
- 9:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. - Jackson  
City Hall
- 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. - Grove Hill  
Town Hall
- 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. - Monroeville  
City Hall
- 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. - Frisco City  
City Hall

**Tuesday, January 24**

- 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. - Grand Bay  
First Baptist Church
- 9:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. - Bayou La Batre  
City Hall
- 11:30 p.m. - 12:30 p.m. - Dauphin Island  
Town Hall
- 1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. - Saraland  
Civic Center
- 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. - Creola  
City Hall

**Wednesday, January 25**

- 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. - Stockton  
Stage Coach Café
- 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. - Uriah  
Uriah Fire Station
- 11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. - Poarch Creek  
Indians, Tribal Auditorium
- 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. - Flomaton  
Town Hall
- 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. - East Brewton  
City Hall

**Thursday, January 26**

- 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. - Spanish Fort  
City Hall
- 9:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. - Point Clear  
St. Francis Traditional Episcopal Church
- 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. - Magnolia Springs  
St. Paul's Episcopal Chapel
- 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. - Elberta  
Town Hall
- 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. - Summerdale  
Community Center

## Distinguished Service Award

*I was honored to receive the Distinguished Service Award at the Electric Cities' 2005 Annual Meeting. This award was presented in acknowledgement of my strong support of Alabama's electric cities. Pictured with me (l-r) are Fred Clark, Electric Cities of Alabama's Executive Director, and Mike Manning, Electric Cities 2004-2005 Chairman.*



# Katrina brings national attention to Gulf Coast

Over four months have passed since Hurricane Katrina made landfall along the Gulf Coast. While we are still dealing with tremendous devastation, the recovery effort has brought national attention to our region and our recovery.

I have been extremely gratified by the strong support shown to south Alabama by the administration in the aftermath of the storm. President Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and several cabinet level officials have visited Alabama's Gulf Coast to tour the devastation and to offer their continuing support and prayers for everyone affected by the storm.

I was particularly honored that Dr. Rice — the first-ever secretary of state from Alabama — spent so much time with us one Sunday this past September. From attending a church service with community leaders and congregants at Pilgrim's Rest AME Zion Church in Whistler — where the pastor, Rev. Malone Smith, Jr., delivered one of the most inspiring sermons I have ever heard — to working for a time at the disaster relief center in Bayou La Batre, Dr. Rice clearly showed that her heart was with her fellow Alabamians.

In fact, during her visit, she went well beyond offering a helping hand — she went so far as to shed tears and share hugs with those who, in a matter of just a few hours, had lost everything to the rising floodwaters.

The president also sent his economic team — Treasury Secretary John Snow,



*Mobile was one of the first cities President Bush visited when he toured the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29. Officials from Louisiana and Mississippi joined those of us from Alabama in briefing the president at the Coast Guard Aviation Training Center at Bates Field.*

Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, and Social Security Commissioner Jo Anne B. Barnhart — to assess both the near-term and long-term economic needs of our region. Governor Bob Riley, Senators Richard Shelby and Jeff Sessions as well as numerous community leaders joined me in a roundtable discussion at the Mobile Convention Center to discuss assistance available to both individuals and small businesses.

Towns and cities throughout the United States have also opened their hearts and homes to thousands of families displaced from their homes as a result of this horrific storm. Relief organizations, both large and small, coordinated deliveries of food, clothing, water, and other basic necessities to those impacted by Katrina.

Help has even arrived from across the ocean, as over two dozen countries have stepped forward to offer financial and material support to the American people.

It is during difficult times like this that the true American spirit reveals itself — the spirit of caring and concerned Americans. Never in our country's history have we witnessed a natural disaster that has impacted so many people across such a wide area — more than 90,000 square miles. We should all take comfort in the fact that we never lost hope.

Let each of us — by our words and deeds — continue to spread this hope to all of our friends and families across the Gulf Coast.



*Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice gets a briefing from State Rep. Spencer Collier, Bayou La Batre Mayor Stan Wright and Volunteers of America's Margaret Coley on the condition of south Mobile County following the storm.*

## Free credit reports now available

During the 108th Congress, the president signed into law the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions (FACT) Act of 2003. The FACT Act amended the Free Credit Reporting Act to allow a consumer to request one free copy of his or her credit report from each nationwide consumer reporting agency once during a twelve month period. What better time to make such a request than here at the first of the year.

There are three ways an individual may obtain his or her credit report:

- 1) Go to [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) to request an online credit report.
- 2) Call toll free at 1-877-322-8228. Hearing impaired consumers can access via TDD service at 1-877-730-4104.
- 3) Print a hard copy of the credit report form at the aforementioned website. After doing so, mail the form to:

Annual Credit Report Request Service  
Post Office Box 105281  
Atlanta, GA 30348-5281

Additionally, south Alabamians may also request a free copy of his or her credit report after having a fraud alert placed in his or her file. These reports must be provided to the consumer no later than three business days after the request is made.

Finally, be attentive to any promotional scams that may take place. Unfortunately, identity thieves may view this new benefit as an opening to obtain personal information. Don't give out personal information unless you are the one who initiated contact and you know who you're dealing with. Use continued vigilance, and be wary of scams by those who call or write asking for your personal information.

## New prescription coverage offered

Starting January 1 of this year, Medicare is offering new prescription drug coverage aimed to reduce the out-of-pocket costs associated with taking prescription drugs. Although optional, the plan has been designed to enable senior citizens to make informed decisions when choosing which prescription drug plan is right for them.

This new program will work much like insurance. Each month a recipient will be required to pay a small monthly premium, and depending on the plan you choose, Medicare drug coverage will help you by covering both brand-name and generic drugs at pharmacies that are convenient for you.

Here in south Alabama, there are a number of plans available for your consideration. Admittedly, finding the right plan can be somewhat confusing at first, given that each plan varies depending on the amount and types of prescription drugs each person takes. That is why it is so important that seniors pick the plan that is right for their individual needs.

All senior citizens on Medicare, regardless of income or drug spending, are eligible to participate in this voluntary program. Medicare will even provide extra help to those seniors with high prescription drug costs.

In October of last year, you should have received information that will help you:

- Check if your prescription drugs are covered in the new plans.
- Find out which pharmacies the drug plans use in your area to make sure they are convenient.
- Determine if the monthly fees work for you.

Enrollment for the program began on November 15, 2005. The last day to sign-up for coverage this year, without penalty, is May 15, 2006. Otherwise, your next opportunity to enroll will be from November 15, 2006 to December 31, 2006.

For more information on Medicare prescription drug coverage, please call 1-800-MEDICARE or visit the website [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). Additionally, many times your local pharmacist is your best resource for advice about which plan may work best for you.

# Region's Economy Rolling into 2006

## EADS lands in Mobile

Last summer, literally the world watched as Mobile and south Alabama were picked from 70 locations throughout the nation to be the home of EADS North America's new aerospace engineering center.

EADS (European Aeronautics Defense and Space Company) is the second largest aerospace and defense company in the world and the parent company of Airbus, contributing more than \$6 billion to the U.S. economy each year.

Their selection of Mobile's Brookley Field for their new aerospace engineering center will be even bigger news should EADS — and their U.S. partner, Northrop Grumman — win even a share of the Air Force's refueling tanker contract, a prospect which would require a state-of-the-art production facility employing some 1,000 Gulf Coast workers.

Without a doubt, this story ranks as one of the most significant economic development announcements for our region in the past several decades. The total investment by EADS in south Alabama — which could ultimately top \$600 million — puts Mobile in an elite category with the handful of other U.S. cities that lead in aerospace technology: St. Louis, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Seattle.

Moreover, the selection of south Alabama is also the direct result of a tremendous, coordinated effort led by Governor Bob Riley, our entire congressional delegation, a host of local officials and community leaders, development representatives and others who, from the start, set out to insure that Mobile would come out on top.

The 150 or so jobs represented by the EADS engineering center — the groundbreaking for this phase of the project is set for January 30 — is significant for several reasons.

First, these are highly-skilled workers, and these jobs command top wages within the industry. Second, this will provide a new outlet for engineering students at the University of South Alabama to compete for jobs right here at home rather than having to leave the area to put their education and skills to work.

Naturally, winning the contract for the construction of the refueling tankers will provide an even greater market for highly skilled, high paying aerospace jobs in south Alabama.

The chances for this possibility were enhanced considerably last September when EADS announced that Los Angeles-based Northrop Grumman would be the prime contractor for this team. Northrop is one of the most respected names in the defense industry and brings with it a strong reputation for quality and value at the Pentagon.

Friends, this is great news, indeed, for our entire region, and I am extremely hopeful this announcement — which recognizes the many good things we have here in south Alabama — is only the first of even more good news for our region and our state in the years ahead.



*I was honored to join Governor Bob Riley, EADS Chairman and CEO Ralph Crosby, former NFL great Roger Staubach (president, the Staubach Companies) and Allan McArtor, Chairman of Airbus, NA, for the June announcement that EADS North America had chosen Mobile. The groundbreaking for the first phase of this center is set for January 30 at Brookley Field.*

## Austal USA wins Navy contract

I want to commend General Dynamics and Austal USA.

On October 14, the Navy awarded General Dynamics and Austal a \$223 million contract to build the Navy's new Littoral Combat Ship (LCS). The LCS will be a brand new class of fast, highly maneuverable warships designed to carry the fight to the enemy in areas close to shore.

It will also be the world's most advanced high speed military sea craft.

As you may know, the General Dynamics/Austal USA team was one of only two teams in the country contracted to design the ship. You should be pleased to know this recent construction award allows the team to move forward and build its first LCS.

The LCS will be built at Austal USA's shipyard in Mobile, which is in the process of a \$25 million expansion. This contract will create more than 350 new jobs for the south Alabama economy.

We can all be extremely proud that the Navy has shown such confidence in General Dynamics and its Mobile-based partner, Austal USA. Mobile has a strong naval heritage, and this program opens yet another chapter in that history. It is gratifying to see companies like Austal USA create good, high-paying jobs that are so important to our local economy.



*Artist's rendering of the newest Navy warship to defend America, being built in Mobile at Austal USA.*

## Partnership inked at State Docks

More good economic news came our way in late 2005 with the announcement by the Alabama State Port Authority that it has entered into a joint venture with two of the world's largest containerized shipping lines and terminal operators, APM Terminals, with corporate headquarters in The Hague, Netherlands, and CMA CGM, which is headquartered in Marseille, France.

Governor Bob Riley and Port Authority Director and CEO, James K. Lyons, were on hand for the late November announcement. Both men promised not only hundreds of new jobs would follow but countless new business opportunities aimed at continuing Alabama's economic growth and progress.

Construction of the container terminal, located at Mobile's Choctaw Point near Brookley Field, began last April. The project will be developed in phases with some 900 jobs being created during the construction period alone. During its first year of operation, the terminal is projected to support 310 permanent jobs, rising to 470 by 2015.

I'd like to commend Jimmy Lyons and the Alabama State Port Authority for bringing this important public-private partnership to fruition.

*Artist's rendering of an aerial view of the new container facility under construction at Choctaw Point.*



# House tackling illegal immigration

Few issues have generated more mail and comments in recent years than America's rather ineffective attempts, to date, to get a handle on controlling our borders and dealing with the growing problems associated with illegal immigration.

At long last, the House passed a bipartisan border security bill late last year by a vote of 239-182. H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act, would take long-needed steps to ensure our nation's borders are protected. Among the bill's provisions are plans to:

- **Establish control of our borders and ports.**

Additional manpower would include 1,000 new full-time port of entry inspectors over the next four years and 1,500 additional K-9 units over the next five years, as well as a plan to provide border patrol with military support.

- **Seek better cooperation between local and federal law enforcement.** The bill would authorize and reimburse local sheriffs in 29 counties along the southern border to enforce our immigration laws and transfer illegal aliens to federal custody.

## Did you know?

### The United States has:

- 2000 miles of border with Mexico
- 5500 miles of border with Canada
- 9500 miles of shoreline
- 157 land ports of entry
- 361 seaports

- **Eliminate "catch and release" practices.** The bill would order mandatory detention by October 1 for all aliens apprehended at U.S. land borders attempting to cross illegally, as well as authorize 32,000 new detention beds over the next four years.

- **Expedite removal of all illegal aliens who are apprehended within 14 days of entry and 100 miles of a U.S. land border.**

- **Establish physical barriers with widespread state-of-the-art surveillance technology including cameras, sensors, radar and unmanned aerial vehicles.**

This most recent action came on the heels of the REAL ID Act, which established minimum security requirements for state-issued drivers' licenses and identification cards including a requirement that states must verify that an applicant is a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or valid visa holder.

It should be noted that one key issue H.R. 4437 does not address is a guest worker program. Recently supported by the president, such a program would allow temporary workers to register for legal status for a fixed time period and then be required to return home.

As many vital industries throughout the First District, such as seafood, agriculture and tourism, require the assistance of legal, seasonal workers, it is likely that Congress will look at such a temporary guest worker program in the coming months. We'll keep you posted.

# Your tax dollars returning home for important projects

After months of negotiations and almost two years of delay, one of the most significant bills to pass the 109th Congress was the reauthorization of a new six-year highway bill.

The Transportation Equity Act — A Legacy for Users (known as TEA-LU) returns more than \$286 billion to taxpayers in funding for highway, bridge, and surface transportation projects across the United States.

Closer to home, TEA-LU provides the state of Alabama in excess of \$700 million each year from the federal government to address our transportation infrastructure issues right here in Alabama. This is your money to begin with, money collected in the form of federal taxes every time you buy a gallon of gas. Now, this funding will start coming back to the state for much needed highway work here.

TEA-LU is also a jobs bill. Many projects funded by this bill, as well as the projects funded through the money sent to the transportation departments in each state, will result in the creation of thousands of new jobs.

Two projects included in the final version of the bill are of special significance for south Alabama.

County Road 83, a north-south corridor located in Baldwin County (more commonly known as the Foley Beach Express), will receive a total of \$26 million in federal funds. This money, on top of some \$24.2 million committed by Governor Bob Riley, as well as local and county contributions, will help to four-lane this important road all the way from Orange Beach/Gulf Shores to I-10. County Road 83 will provide residents and visitors with an additional hurricane evacuation route for those who currently rely almost exclusively on Highway 59.

Additionally, with the rapid population growth we are seeing in Baldwin County, the expansion of County Road 83 will almost certainly provide improved access to areas which could potentially be used for the development of new business and industry that may also be attracted to the area.

Another high priority project for south Alabama got a big boost in TEA-LU with the securing of some \$8.8 million to begin a study — and eventual construction — to four-lane U.S. Highway 84, a major east-west corridor



*I was honored to be a guest speaker at Governor Riley's announcement that the state would begin the four-laning of Highway 84. On hand were a number of officials including (l-r) State Rep. Nick Williams, Chamber of Commerce executive Sandy Smith and Monroe County Probate Judge Otha Lee Biggs.*  
(Photo courtesy The Monroe Journal)

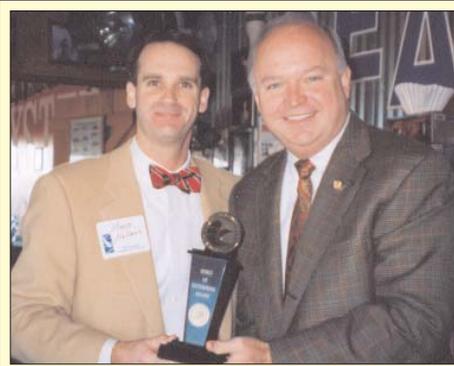
running through Monroe and Clarke counties.

Highway 84, also known as the El Camino Corridor, runs east and west through the states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. The funding we secured in TEA-LU would enable the state highway department to begin surveying and acquiring the right of way to four-lane Highway 84 from Interstate 65 west through Monroe and Clarke counties, eventually going all the way to the Mississippi state line.

As the residents of this area know, this is a part of our state that over the years has not experienced the same type of economic growth as other areas of Alabama.

Once this expansion is completed, which, in all honesty, will take several years, this highway will provide much needed infrastructure improvements to attract new industry and expand existing industry, thereby increasing the attraction of economic investment to the northwestern region of the First District.

Now that this funding is in place, the real work begins. While many people deserve credit for both of these projects, the fact is neither of them would have been possible had it not been for the strong commitment and leadership from both U.S. Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Mobile) and Governor Bob Riley.



## U.S. Chamber presents Spirit of Enterprise Award

*Moore Hallmark recently presented me with the U.S. Chamber's Spirit of Enterprise Award at the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce's Eggs and Issues breakfast. The breakfast, held at the newly re-opened Original Oyster House on the Causeway, was attended by more than 75 Eastern Shore business leaders. The award is based on rankings the U.S. Chamber gives to members of Congress based on a series of key business votes.*

## Deficit reduction and spending restraints

Through tax relief and job creation, spending control and program reform, the national deficit dropped by approximately \$100 billion in 2005 and some \$200 billion over the past couple of years.

However, just like your household budget, in order to save more, the federal government must spend less. President Ronald Reagan once said, "We don't have a trillion-dollar debt because we haven't taxed enough; we have a trillion-dollar debt because we spend too much."

To control overall spending and continue reducing the national deficit, Congress last year took a close look at the growth rate of certain programs that, if allowed to continue to grow on their present paths, would in just 10 years consume 62 percent of our federal budget each year — 62 percent!

And for the first time in more than a decade,

the House passed legislation late last year aimed at slowing the overall growth rate in federal spending by some \$40 billion over the next five years. This action must be given final approval when we return to Washington later this month.

Slowing the growth rate of federal spending is only one part of the equation, but it is an important part. And as we enter a new year, it is important to dispel a notion — prevalent in some areas of Washington — that basically equates the amount of money you spend in America with our level of compassion. Friends, there's no guarantee that if you spend more money, you must care more. Moreover, the money we are spending is *yours* to begin with.

As we enter into the hot budget debates again this year, your thoughts on this — and all other topics — are always appreciated.

## Local unemployment rate bodes well

As 2006 begins, Americans can take comfort from the fact that the economic policies currently in place are working. Our national economy is doing extremely well even in the face of two years of devastating natural disasters and funding a global war on terror. And closer to home, the economy in south Alabama is moving in a very positive direction in all six First District counties.

Americans have shown resilience and a dedication to rebuild what we have lost. Fortunately, we have created an atmosphere where small business owners have taken risks, invested in capital improvements and are creating jobs.

The national unemployment rate is lower than the average of the last four decades, the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s. In the month of November, 215,000 jobs were created, and the national unemployment rate remained unchanged at 5.0 percent.

In Alabama, the unemployment rate dropped to 3.6 percent during the month of November. This marks the tenth consecutive month that Alabama's unemployment figure has been below the national rate and may be the lowest rate ever recorded in Alabama history.

Over the past year, Alabama had a net gain of 19,900 new jobs. The majority of these jobs occurred in professional and business services followed by trade; educational and health services; manufacturing; and leisure and hospitality.

Whether it is job growth or new home sales, there is ample evidence we are on the right track and must continue on the policy path that has fostered this economic growth surge.

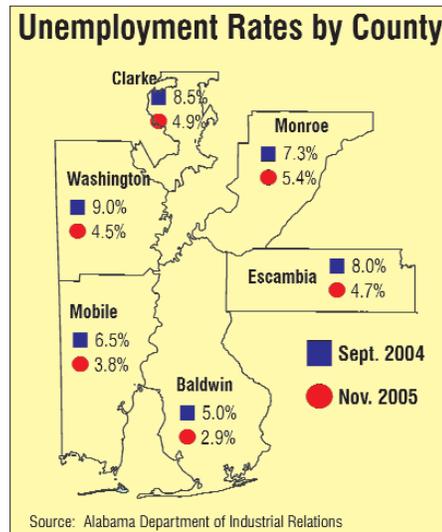
During his State of the Union message, President Bush will once again call on Congress to keep the economic momentum going by making tax relief permanent and working against efforts to increase taxes. Current tax relief provisions have led to a 15 percent increase in federal revenue over the past year while budget deficit estimates have

been reduced by approximately \$100 billion during the same period.

Congress will once again play a major role in the debate over where our economy goes from here. A prime example of this will be extending the reduced tax rates on capital gains and dividend income through 2010. According to the Joint Committee on Taxation, over 60 percent of Americans receiving capital gains or dividend income have incomes of \$100,000 or less and stand to benefit from the passage of this proposal.

A strong, vibrant economy is necessary to help us continue to reduce the federal deficit. And as we continue to add to the more than 4.4 million jobs created since May 2003, we should expect to see higher production, increased income, and higher consumer spending, all of which help grow the economy.

During the coming debate on the economy and taxes, your views are welcome and appreciated.



## Legislative wrap-up

During the first session of the 109th Congress, the House led the way with a number of important bills, many of which made it to the president's desk for his signature. From immigration reform and tax relief, to providing direct response to Hurricane Katrina, the flurry of legislative activity included some of the following key accomplishments:

- **Katrina Victims Assistance:** Some \$66 billion in emergency relief funds have already been appropriated to the states and victims in the affected region. Congress also provided direct assistance to thousands of victims by waiving repayments of Pell Grants and other federal education assistance if students are attending a school affected by Katrina.

- Additionally, we approved a one year, 20% increase in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, as well as enacted numerous individual tax relief measures, such as ensuring that the cancellation of a mortgage will not be taxed as personal debt relief.

- **Gulf Opportunity Zone Act:** Signed by President Bush on December 22, this legislation will provide tax benefits for investment in the areas of the Gulf devastated by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. This legislation will benefit not only existing businesses in the First District — by encouraging expansion — but will also help to recruit future investment and new businesses to Alabama.

- **Class Action Fairness Act of 2005:** Signed by the president on February 18, this measure was intended to reform current law related to class action lawsuits, allowing such suits to be removed to federal courts and reducing the potential for abuse of settlement awards by attorneys. Other tort reform bills have passed the House but await further action in the Senate such as a bill aimed at restoring mandatory sanctions for filing frivolous lawsuits, as well as a bill to prohibit obesity or weight gain-related claims against the food industry.

- **Tax Relief:** Fueled by the need to keep our economy strong, the House passed the Tax Relief Extension Reconciliation Act of 2005 on December 8. The purpose of this bill is to keep the capital gains rate from increasing to 20 percent and to keep the maximum tax rate on dividends from increasing to 35 percent. Failure to act on both measures could slow down an economy that has created 4.4 million new jobs since May 2003 and has seen the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grow by at least three percent for ten straight quarters. (The GDP grew by 4.3 percent for the third quarter of 2005.)

- **Energy Policy Act of 2005:** The intent of this bill, signed into law on August 8, is to ensure a more secure, affordable and reliable energy supply by encouraging more domestic production of oil and gas. Additionally, through conservation and better environmental options, the goal is to help bring America's energy system into the 21st century (see article on page 8).

- **The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005:** The House passed the first leg of this important — and long overdue — legislation on December 16. Protecting our borders is just one part of this timely challenge. Penalizing all new illegal immigrants, as well as those who illegally aid them, is the second part of this complex puzzle. And keeping better track of immigrants who want to come here and play by the rules must also be a top priority in 2006 (see related article on page 5).

- **Deficit Reduction Act:** This legislation would save federal taxpayers an additional \$40 billion over five years. Deficit reduction efforts and legislation passed by the House have resulted in an estimated \$200 billion reduction in the deficit during the past 19 months. The Deficit Reduction Act would continue these efforts.

# Remembering Rosa Parks



*The body of Mrs. Rosa Parks lies in honor in our nation's Capitol Rotunda. A pioneer of the civil rights movement, Mrs. Parks was a native of Tuskegee.*

Last year, our nation lost a true pioneer of the modern civil rights movement.

Tuskegee native Rosa Parks, at the time an unknown seamstress who refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery bus one December evening 50 years ago, went on to become an inspiration to freedom-loving people around the world.

As the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, Mrs. Parks's arrest was "an individual expression of a timeless longing for human dignity and freedom. She was anchored to that seat by the accumulated indignities of days gone and the boundless aspirations of generations yet unborn."

Near the end of her life, Mrs. Parks deservedly received many accolades. A museum and library facility located on the Montgomery corner where she boarded the bus is named for her. She received the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award bestowed by the United States government, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award.

In November, Congress cleared the way for this civil rights pioneer to be the first woman to lie in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. This tribute is usually reserved for presidents, generals and dignitaries.

Congress also unanimously approved legislation, which I cosponsored, that will make Mrs. Parks the first African American woman to be honored permanently in National Statuary Hall. The legislation directed the Architect of the Capitol to commission a statue of Mrs. Parks that will stand beside some of the other remarkable people in our nation's history.

A brave American who changed our country for the better, Mrs. Parks was a dignified lady who dedicated her entire life toward the advancement of civil rights for all.

As another daughter of Alabama, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, said, "Without Mrs. Parks, I probably would not be standing here today as secretary of state."

# Congratulations 2006 Academy nominees!

As any student of American history knows, the five United States Service Academies have produced some of the finest leaders the world has ever known.

Moreover, the education students receive at these institutions — the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, the U.S. Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy at New London and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at King's Point — is one of the best money can buy.

Each year, I am so pleased at the number of young men and women throughout south Alabama who are interested in attending a service academy.

Listed below are the names and photographs of the men and women I was privileged to nominate for the academies' consideration.

For those south Alabama students interested in attending a service academy, it is never too soon to begin the nomination process. One thing is certain — gaining admission to one of the five academies is not easy.

Students currently completing their junior year in high school are eligible to apply for a nomination in the spring of 2006, and the application file must be completed in my office by December 1, 2006.

In addition to the basic age requirements, candidates for admission must also display significant degrees of academic achievement (displayed by high school transcripts as well as SAT and/or ACT scores); have demonstrated leadership in school, church, or community activities; be of good moral character; and successfully complete a medical review and physical aptitude examination.

Our office looks forward to working with any interested students and their families toward a nomination to one of the five academies. For more information, you should contact Brooks Chew in my Baldwin County office at 251-943-2073. Additionally, information is available on my website at <http://bonner.house.gov>.



*Bert Baker*



*Will Cadden*



*John Devine*



*Nathan Farish*



*Mark Gonzales*



*Daniel Hickox*



*Dewitt Jones*



*Kyle Jones*



*Bill Guilfoyle*



*Christine Hernandez*



*Josh Morganthall*



*Milton Nettles*



*Tim Parker*



*Jeronica Pinkney*



*Angel Ruggs*



*Sam Shea*



*William Smith*



*Jacob Sowell*

## In Memoriam



*Kaitlin Overstreet*

As this newsletter was going to press, our office received the tragic news that one of my academy nominees, Kaitlin Overstreet, age 17, was killed in a tragic automobile accident on New Year's Day.

Kaitlin, a senior at McGill-Toolen in Mobile, was truly an outstanding young lady. She was an honor student, a star on her track team and a member of the Ambassador Club, which represents the school during official functions. Additionally, she was a member of the Mobile Azalea Trail Maids.

Kaitlin had expressed a strong desire to attend the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. Because of her outstanding character and preparation, it had been my pleasure to nominate her to not only the Naval Academy, but also the Air Force Academy and the Merchant Marine Academy.

Our deepest sympathies are extended to Kaitlin's family and her many friends.

## Workshop for High School Leaders

A tradition in the First Congressional District for nearly twenty years, the Workshop for High School Leaders, gives high school government and journalism students the opportunity to question representatives from all levels of state and federal government as well as members of the Gulf Coast broadcast and print media.

As was the case last year, the workshop is always a highly successful gathering, and a way of encouraging the leaders of tomorrow to take an interest in the events shaping the world around them.

I am anticipating what is sure to be an outstanding slate of guests. I have invited Senate Pro Tempore Lowell Barron and several other state officials to serve as a panel on state government. This panel, moderated by WALA's Bob Grip, will discuss the importance and impact of our state legislative process.

Additionally, we are scheduled to have a media panel with representatives from Gulf Coast print and television outlets, as well as newly elected Mayor Sam Jones of Mobile as a featured guest.

My workshop will be held on Friday, January 27, 2006, on the campus of the University of South Alabama. With such an impressive lineup of speakers, this year's workshop promises to be the best yet.

For students interested in attending, please contact Frazier Payne in my Mobile office at 251-690-2811 or 1-800-288-8721.

## Some new faces, same commitment

During the past year, I have been privileged to welcome several new staff members to my offices in Washington, D.C., Mobile, and Baldwin County.

I have always been blessed to have a talented team of men and women working with me, and these new staffers have proven to be a great addition. You can be proud of the work they do every day on your behalf, and I hope you won't hesitate to contact them whenever you need assistance.

### Washington Office:

Alan Spencer - Chief of Staff  
Kelle Strickland - Legislative Director and Counsel  
Watson Donald - Senior Legislative Assistant  
Jon Hand - Legislative Assistant  
Nancy Wall - Press Secretary  
Suzannah Weeks - Executive Assistant/Washington Scheduler  
Errical Pouncy - Director of Constituent Services

### Mobile and Baldwin County Offices:

Eliska Morgan - Deputy Chief of Staff/District Director  
Elizabeth Roney - Senior Caseworker  
Jeanne Cabe - District Scheduler/Office Manager  
Landra Day - Constituent Services Rep./Grants Coordinator  
Frazier Payne - Field Rep. for Mobile, Clarke, and Washington Counties  
Rachel Kaiser - Field Rep. for Baldwin, Escambia, and Monroe Counties  
Courtney Soward - Constituent Services Representative  
Brooks Chew - Constituent Services Representative  
Brandy Jackson - Constituent Services Representative

## HOW TO CONTACT US...

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Web site: <http://bonner.house.gov>

## Local tribe seeks federal recognition

For years, the MOWA (Mobile Washington) Band of Choctaw Indians, residing in and around McIntosh, has sought federal recognition by the Department of Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

Recognition would make the tribe eligible for the federal aid that is available to all legally recognized tribes, benefits such as housing and education dollars.

Unfortunately, the recognition process has been filled with one frustration and setback after another.

A little history: The MOWAs were recognized as a tribe by the state of Alabama in 1979, and filed their original application for federal recognition back in 1988.

Nine years later — and after a change in the BIA's evaluation policies — the MOWAs were denied recognition, even though other tribes with similar circumstances were granted federal recognition.

Unfortunately, the evaluation policies and practices of the federal recognition process have become the subject of many Congressional hearings and much criticism.

In fact, MOWA Chief Wilford "Longhair" Taylor appeared as a witness before the House Resources Committee in March 2004, sharing the tribe's experiences with the committee regarding the federal recognition process.

Because of the widespread belief in the area — and in national Native American circles — that the tribe has a legitimate claim to federal recognition — and because the process has become so fatally flawed — I introduced H.R. 3526 last year, a bill which would federally recognize the MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians.

While introducing this legislation by no means guarantees the tribe the recognition they are seeking, it is an important "next step" in the process. My only intention is to make certain that the same rules that apply to other Native American tribes apply equally to our friends in southwest Alabama.

We'll be sure to keep you posted as this bill makes its way through the committee process.



Chief Taylor

## Storms reveal need for energy

In the aftermath of one of the busiest hurricane seasons ever, practically no one was exempt from the long lines at the gas pump and record fuel prices that were common not only to our area along the Gulf Coast, but all across the nation.

Even with a major energy bill signed into law last year, the problems highlighted during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita reveal that much more needs to be done to limit the United States' dependency on foreign oil and gas.

In an effort to do this, Congress considered an additional bill last year to the Energy Policy Act of 2005, the Gasoline for America's Security Act of 2005 (GAS).

The Energy Policy Act promotes domestic oil production, offers tax credits for purchasing hybrid cars, launches a state-of-the-art program to get hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles on the road, and boosts funding for the Department of Energy's "Clean Cities" program that provides grants to state and local governments to acquire alternative fueled and fuel cell vehicles. The Energy Policy Act was signed into law on August 8, 2005.

The GAS Act, passed by the House on October 7, 2005, is currently being considered by the Senate. This bill would expedite construction of new refining capacity in the United States and ease the regulatory road blocks involved with the construction of these refineries. Additionally, it would require the president to designate refinery sites on federal lands, including at least three closed military installations.

This bill would also direct the Department of Energy to establish and carry out programs to encourage the use of carpooling to reduce the consumption of gasoline, and it outlaws price gouging in gasoline and diesel fuel sales in times of disaster.

It is imperative that we continue to find new domestic sources of energy to help limit our dependency on foreign supplies. We'll keep you posted of any progress made in the coming months.